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NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

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SUBJECT: ZVOBGO ON RULING PARTY DYNAMICS

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell under Section 1.4 b/d

Summary

11. (C) Eddison Zvobgo, Jr., an astute player in the ruling party's younger generation and son of Robert Mugabe's late principal intra-party rival, on September 12 told the Ambassador that the ruling party was essentially biding its time until its octegannarian leader passed from the stage. Zvobgo, who was recently installed in the party's Masvingo provincial hierarchy, asserted that the party remained relatively unified despite personal rivalries for now and characterized ethnic tensions as overblown. Personal rivalries could spell the party's doom after Mugabe's departure but key players could line up behind Joyce Mujuru, about whom Zvobgo had relatively complimentary words. Zvobgo urged the USG to continue to engage the ruling party and to step up its humanitarian assistance to Zimbabwe. End summary.

Party Resigned to Unpopular President

12. (C) Over lunch at the Residence, Zvobgo told the Ambassador that ZANU-PF was essentially a conservative, nationalist party. But for Mugabe, its members were not ideological but aligned according to perceived competing or mutual personal interests. Zvobgo claimed that "99.9 percent" of the party recognized the "madness" of GOZ policy, which had been an unmitigated failure essentially since independence. Policies that brought the stock market to a standstill were only the latest example of gross incompetence stemming from the top. He asserted that only Mugabe carried the "baggage" of his legacy within the party; those who assumed charge upon his departure could be expected to jettison that legacy and quickly re-orient the party more toward the West.

13. (C) Compounding people's frustrations and low morale was that nobody had a sense about how policy was even being made, Zvobgo added. He related that on meeting retired General and Minister for Indigenization and Empowerment Josiah Tungamirai shortly before he died last month, Tungamirai had his head in his hands lamenting the party's complete lack of transparency. Tungamirai had said that even though he was then a senior party figure who sat in the politburo and the cabinet, he didn't have a clue about how decisions were being made. The party's complete lack of transparency was "politically traumatic" to the party's membership, Zvobgo maintained.

14. (C) According to Zvobgo, Mugabe's advancing age fueled such a cautious posture among politicians at every level that meaningful debate was absent. Mugabe remained quite fit but everybody "could smell succession" and refused to risk their necks by taking any position that might raise the President's ire. Zvobgo laughed at those who ridiculed Finance Minister Murerwa for not confronting the President on basic economic mismanagement when nobody confronted the President meaningfully on any issue. At the same time, players quietly postured and devoted political energies to undermining each other while avoiding attention themselves. Emmerson Mnangagwa's example underscored to all what happened when one shows too much ambition too soon.

15. (C) With most national policy set from the top, politicians were left consigned to the role of ward-healer, trying to deliver local services to their constituencies, Zvobgo noted. This made them as dependent as ever to GOZ ministries who commanded what little resources remained, thus reinforcing the obeisance demanded by patronage.

Party Unity Despite Rivalries

16. (C) Zvobgo painted a picture of relative party unity at the top despite the frustration and clash of personal interests. He asserted that purported ethnic divisions within the party were overstated and sometimes magnified by

posturing individuals looking to get purchase in their attacks on rivals. In fact, aside from Solomon Mujuru, who lacked ambition to be President, Mugabe had never kept any individual or group close to him for the whole period since independence, Zvobgo maintained. Mugabe's skill in balancing competing personalities while keeping them off balance sometimes pushed others to try to exploit ethnic tensions that weren't really there.

17. (C) Zvobgo noted that long significant factional rivalries in Masvingo were subsiding. "For whatever reasons", the party leadership had installed elder party maverick Dzikamayi Mavhaire and himself to run the party's provincial structures. Zvobgo noted that Tungamirai had been the party's de facto senior figure in the province, but his passing did not leave any official vacancy (other than his parliamentary seat) and so would not likely trigger factional infighting. Like most throughout the country, people in Masvingo were absorbed with basic issues of food and housing and were uninclined to political action.

18. (C) Zvobgo dismissed the "third force" as a mere expression of frustration with the dysfunctional political environment. Those behind talk of a third force could stake out no political territory on a Zimbabwean political map that lacked an ideological left or right. They might gain sympathy in the short run but could not gain adherents for the long haul. Ruling party supporters would not eschew the perks of the patronage system and opposition supporters would be too angry to join the likes of Jonathan Moyo, the third force's most public advocate to date. In any event, he maintained, any momentum behind the third force would come principally at the expense of the MDC, whose existence would ultimately be threatened should the third force emerge.

Mugabe Departure Will Trigger Uncertainty, National Relief

19. (C) The ruling party's dysfunctional internal environment could lead to a destabilizing power struggle on Mugabe's departure, Zvobgo observed. He conceded that this could spell the end of ZANU-PF but asserted that there may well be enough sense of mutual interest for key players to get behind a new leader. "They're not stupid." In this regard, Zvobgo complimented Vice President Joyce Mujuru, to whom he acknowledged he was aligned, as a "common sense" managerial type who could muster sufficient consensus. Whether she could win over competing aspirants, such as Mnangagwa, would depend on the correlation of forces at the time and her ability to give competitors sufficient stake in a new power structure.

10. (C) Zvobgo noted that the overwhelming sense of "national relief" at Mugabe's passing may also play to Joyce Mujuru's advantage. In the same vein, Zvobgo urged the international community to be ready when Mugabe left the scene and not to miss the opportunity to get behind somebody who could get the country on the road to much needed national recovery. Neither the country nor the international community could "afford to dither when our long national nightmare ends."

Urges Bilateral Engagement

11. (C) Zvobgo said he knew "good people" in most of ZANU-PF's provincial structures and urged that we remain engaged with them. He offered to be helpful in facilitating meetings and communications. He further appealed to the USG to continue to respond to Zimbabweans humanitarian needs, especially food and housing. In this regard, he inquired if there was any way to make special arrangements to get food to Masvingo, where hunger was particularly acute.

12. (C) The Ambassador reiterated USG commitment to provide humanitarian assistance, notably in the areas of food and HIV-AIDS, without regard to political considerations. The GOZ's refusal to request assistance or even acknowledge its need for food prevented much needed food assistance from going forward. Without a specific appeal from the GOZ, we could not target food deliveries to Masvingo or anywhere else in the country. The Ambassador suggested that Zvobgo influence the GOZ to adopt a more constructive approach.

13. (C) The Ambassador expressed further frustration and bafflement over the GOZ's relentless pursuit of ruinous, self-destructive policies, which was a significant impediment to rehabilitating relations. Operation Restore Order, for example, represented a major setback and had to be evaluated by the international community as a possible crime against humanity. He cautioned Zimbabwe against viewing the IMF's recent six-month reprieve against expulsion as any kind of victory. Real turn-around at home and in Zimbabwe's international image would require major and sustained economic and political reform.

Bio Note

14. (C) Zvobgo is a confident, affable and accessible interlocutor. His exchanges with the Embassy have been devoid of the sterile political rhetoric that infect exchanges with most in the ruling party. He offers candid and insightful reads of the political situation here. Well-connected inside and outside of his party, he told emboff at an earlier meeting that he followed the returns of the 2002 presidential election at the South Africa home of telecom magnate and GOZ critic Strive Masiyiwa, rooting for the MDC. He sees effective delivery of services to local constituencies, particularly in Masvingo, as a key to political advancement and frequently seeks resources to advance this objective in meetings.

Comment

15. (C) Tensions between ruling party leaders and factions are difficult to evaluate but we agree with Zvobgo that Mugabe can keep the party as cohesive as he needs to for now. The allegiance of Zvobgo (like Mnangagwa, a Karanga) - and ex-Finance Minister Simba Makoni (a Manyika) - to the dominant Mujuru/Zezuru faction suggests the primacy of personal connections and patronage networks over ideology or ethnic allegiance in the posture of the country's next generation of prospective leaders.
DELL